

Slump snaps, and rare coins rise in value

By Roger Boye

The rare coin market finally is creeping out of its recession-racked slump, judging from the results of a respected investment survey.

Collector keepsakes advanced 16.8 percent in value during the 12 months ending June 1, well above the 3.9 percent inflation rate. That return was good enough for fifth place on a list of 14 investment vehicles scrutinized by the Wall Street firm Salomon Brothers.

By contrast, rare stamps fell 6.2 percent in value while farmland and oil prices also declined. Coin investments even did better than diamonds, Chinese ceramics and Treasury bills, according to the seventh-annual survey.

But the Standard & Poor's 500 stock index garnered second place on the list by spurring 51.8 percent during the year. Silver was first in the Investment Derby with a 109.5 percent price gain, but Salomon research director Robert Salomon advises hobbyists to put the top figure in perspective.

Silver values plummeted from their high of about \$50 an ounce in 1980 to less than \$5 an ounce in 1982. Although the price reached about \$12 an ounce when the survey was taken, collectors who bought common-date silver coins at the market peak still suffer huge losses.

Salomon also said on July 14 that his firm ranks coins by following the prices of 20 investment-grade rarities selected by Stack's, a respected New York coin firm. During the last 10 years, that coin portfolio has surged in price an average of 25.7 percent annually.

● To boost business, government workers now are selling the 1983 Olympic silver dollars over-the-counter at mint buildings in Philadelphia, Denver and San Francisco, as well as at the Treasury Department in Washington.

Price for the 90 percent silver coin is \$32, the same amount charged for a keepsake ordered by mail, less the \$2 postage cost.

Meanwhile, Uncle Sam has sold about 985,000 Olympic coins as of July 1, a rate of 110,000 sales a month since ordering began last October. Federal law allows the mint to make as many as 52 million before the end of next year; obviously, the government must greatly increase the sale pace to unload all of the commemoratives.

Part of the proceeds from each sale supports the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

● Nearly 170 coin dealers from throughout the United States and Canada will buy and sell rarities next weekend at the MidAmerica Coin Show in Milwaukee.

Hours are 10 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. next Sunday at the city's MECCA Convention Center, 6th and Kilbourn Streets. Admission is free.